

5 EASY TRIPS

Dining under the stars at Reni Pani: a modern, comfortable take on the cavemen-around-the-fire concept

WILDLIFE
BREAK



4

Reni Pani Jungle Lodge, Madhya Pradesh, Luxurious ecolodge-y

WHY GO

If your idea of a vacation is to lounge comfortably with wine and cheese at hand, while lizards, frogs and insects are conspicuously absent, Reni Pani is not for you. If you are not afraid of the blood-redness of Mother Nature, and can stomach a few nights in the wilderness, living off the land and eating leeches and leaves... Reni Pani is still not for you. It is for that happy in-between tribe of people: men and women who enjoy experiencing the woods the only way they know how –

at arm's length, taking a dip in the pool every time, they break a sweat.

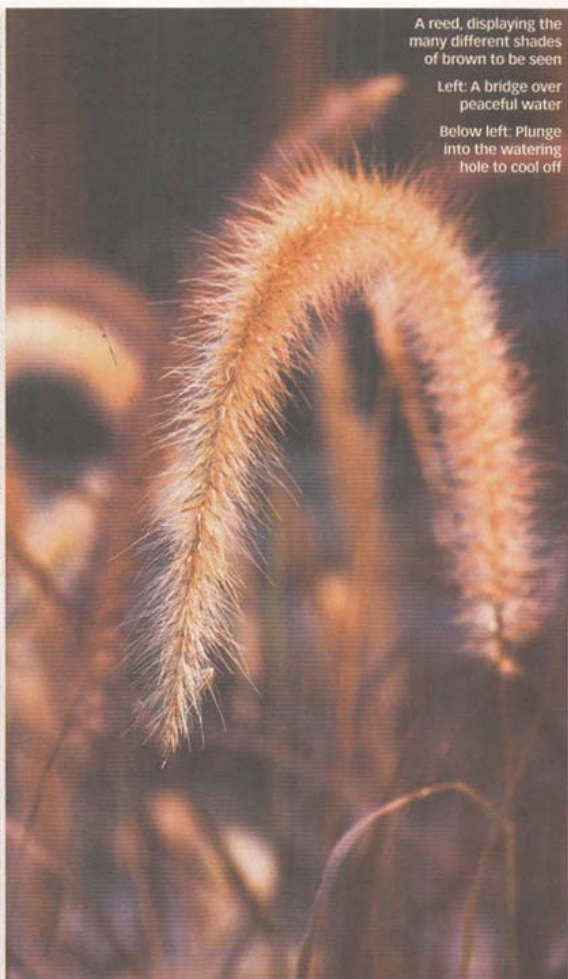
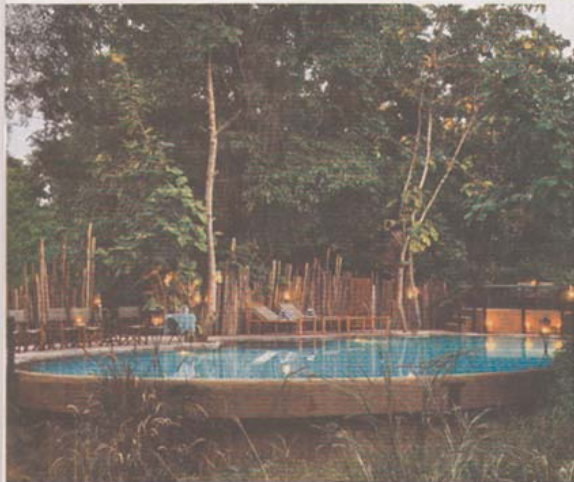
Take for example, the outdoor shower facility: a five-foot-high cement wall shields the bather from the jungle, while still providing them with a view. The rooms at this lodge in the Panchmarhi Biosphere Reserve, south of Bhopal, are pleasantly plush, and each comes with a personal butler; who needs an intercom when you can just yell out to your

very own very resourceful Man Friday? Among his many skills, he is also trained to give you an on-deck massage... a prospect that will receive no complaints from any even remotely exhausted guest.

As you walk out anywhere in the 30-acre property, the extra layer of wood shavings on the ground promises to cushion your feet, while leading you to the common area: a five-pronged structure (two dining halls, two cosy living rooms and a bar)

replete with locally-sourced art and handicrafts. It is evident that the owners have spent a great deal of time decorating the lodge with an environmentally-affectionate bent of mind; the chandelier is made of leftover *matkas* from the surrounding villages. No tree, management assures us, has been cut, nor mildly displaced in the construction, leading to a very mouse-like ecological footprint. There is even a toy squirrel in each room, which, when placed on the bed, serves as an indication

GREAT FROM
Bhopal



A reed, displaying the many different shades of brown to be seen

Left: A bridge over peaceful water

Below left: Plunge into the watering hole to cool off

GO NOW

Because the beginning of summer brings with it terrific visibility for wildlife in and around the park, though Reni Pani remains a great outdoorsy destination all year round.

to the staff that your sheets need changing, bringing that much-needed element of 'cuteness' to the weighty task of saving the planet.

Reni Pani owners and ardent conservationists, brothers Faiz

and Aly Rashid from Bhopal, along with the resident naturalist Alger Fernandes, make a formidable team to show you around Satpura National Park. You can use a jeep, a boat, an elephant or even your trusty feet to acquaint yourself with the fauna and flora. Reni Pani also gives you the option of either mounting a cycle or a horse, both choices that will unfold many new perspectives along the nature trail.

The talented kitchen staff has, among its repertoire of

delectable meals, a particular proficiency in a variety of soups. The resort will also arrange an evening treat, the 'sun-downer', by placing a few chairs around a little grill by the bushes, which serves as an excellent opportunity to exchange stories or engage in some righteous armchair-environmentalist talk, right in the midst of all the brown and green!

If you're looking for a romantic holiday in the great outdoors, Reni Pani is a quaint combination of luxury

with sticks and stones. The friendly staff, with their huge smiles, along with the Rashids themselves, put together a guest experience that is charmingly interactive.

WORDS VARUN MUKERJI
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FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest city: Bhopal (210 km) is a three-hour drive away. The traffic getting in and out of Bhopal is hectic in the late evening; avoid travelling then. On your way, there are *dhabas* on the highway that you could try if on a tight budget (*upto ₹ 100 per person*). **Highway Treat** in Bhimbetka (*an hour out of Bhopal*) is a more comfortable pit-stop where you can also use the loo (00-91-7685-256425; nowgaon@mptourism.com).

Closest airport: Raja Bhoj International Airport (*about 15km North-West of Bhopal; 195km from Satpura National Park*).

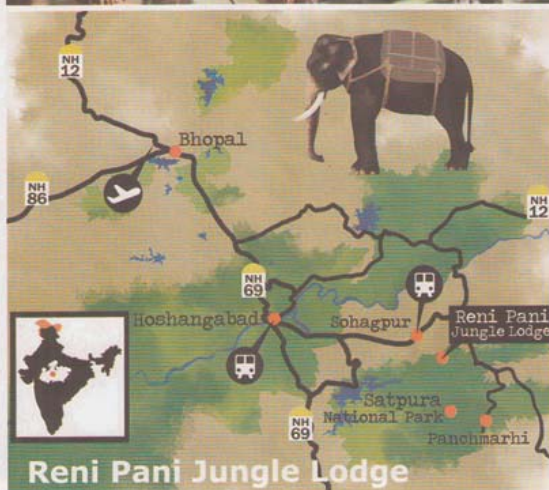
Closest railheads: Sohagpur (17km) is the closest railhead, but Hoshangabad (60km) has better connectivity (from Delhi or Mumbai). Take the 2138 **Punjab Mail** (*leaves Bhopal Junction 5pm, arrives Hoshangabad 6.13pm, ₹ 240 3AC*). Get back by the 2137 **Punjab Mail** (*leaves Hoshangabad 8.10am, arrives Bhopal 9.35am, ₹ 210 3AC*). From the East or West, **Itarsi** (70km) or **Piparya** (50km) are good options.

GETTING AROUND

A 4x4 is best to get around Satpura. Reni Pani can organise a car to pick you up. All travel is taken care of between Reni Pani and the national park.

WHERE TO STAY

Reni Pani Jungle Lodge: This lodge is exquisite and performs beautifully as a comfortable getaway while being surrounded by thick jungle. Service is excellent and guests are treated to an interactive wildlife experience with the on-site naturalist (*reservations: 00-91-755-2661100, 00-91-9993099067, lodge: 00-91-9301999223; renipanijunglelodge.com, info@renipanijunglelodge.com; Sohagpur, Hoshangabad; special two night-three day package for ₹ 30,000, including stay for a couple in a cottage, all meals, two national park*



experiences and two Reni Pani experiences; special rates for children and car transfers from Bhopal Airport or station on request).

WHAT TO EAT

Reni Pani has a fantastic kitchen that specialises in home-styled food. The produce is local, so you can get a chance to experience some of the local cuisine. Try the fish grill, *char gosht* and the soya *kheema*. For dessert, you can choose anything from Kashmiri *firmi* to New York-style cheese-cake! Ask for their *balti* fresh fruit ice-cream to beat the heat.

Be sure to taste the marvellous *mahua martini*!



WHAT TO PACK

Jungle colours – dark greens, browns and beiges. Pack a hat and a scarf to keep the heat at bay. Binoculars are very handy and a good camera is a must. A pair of good walking/hiking boots and a jacket or sweater are recommended, as well as a flashlight, sun block and insect repellent.

SHOPPING

There is little to buy in Satpura, though you can purchase tees and hats at the park gate. Reni Pani has a little shop with souvenirs and forest miscellanea. The village of Budhi (*an hour into the drive towards Bhopal*) is famous for its wooden handicrafts; pick up knick-knacks at about ₹ 100 each.

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

There are toilets at the entrance gates and the patrol camps of the park (besides the lodge of course), but usually nature is where one will have to answer nature's call. Be prepared with toilet paper and sanitiser.

SAFETY

The national park and the buffer region surrounding it is generally safe, provided you follow the guides and the naturalists' instructions. Gallivanting alone, especially at night, is discouraged. Take hot showers to deter ticks.

MEDICAL AID

First-aid is easily accessible. A doctor can be summoned from Sohagpur (21 minutes away). For more serious cases, there is the **District Hospital** in Hoshangabad (00-91-7574-252120).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Since the jungle is all around Reni Pani, keeping an eye on kids, especially under-fives, is essential.

GOOD TO KNOW

- There is no phone network or reception, save at certain points.
- Avoid the use of strong perfumes or colognes.
- The park is open only from sunrise to sunset; plan your arrival and departure accordingly.